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Title:
“Time for Taiwan”: Tourism, Media, and Soft Power

Abstract

In 2012, Lonely Planet, the largest travel guide book publisher in the world, recommended Taiwan in their “Best in Travel: Top 10 Countries for 2012” list. Taiwan’s tourism industry has grown steadily in recent years, as the government under President Ma Ying-jeou allocated more funds to promote tourism as a strategy for enhancing Taiwan’s global image. Ma repeatedly urges Taiwan to increase its “soft power” so that it can stand on the international stage. His soft-power campaign includes several projects on tourism, such as commercials on CNN and BBC, print ads in *The Economist*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* and prominent “Time for Taiwan” displays on London and New York City double-decker buses. The government hopes that by 2016, the number of visitors to Taiwan will reach 10 million per year, compared to 7.3 million in 2012. While scholars (e.g. Wang and Lu 2008; Deslile 2010) have discussed Taiwan’s democracy, free speech, and human rights as its major sources of soft power, few have considered tourism as a resource. This paper examines the relationship between Taiwan’s soft power strategies and tourism media. It considers how the Tourism Bureau works with the newly established Ministry of Culture, whose stated aim is to “contribute to the nation’s soft power by promoting Taiwan’s unique blend of modern and traditional cultures on the international stage.” I analyze the image of Taiwan projected in media products such as the “Time for Taiwan” and “Taiwan Tour & Gourmet Guide” videos and in Discovery Travel and Living Channel’s travel program “Fun Taiwan,” broadcast in 25 countries around Asia. I discuss how Taiwan attempts to distinguish itself by emphasizing local cuisine, folk festivals, indigenous culture, and the friendliness of the people. I also examine some of the visitors’ reactions after travelling to the island.